

Tips for Getting a Dyslexia Diagnosis

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You've suspected it since your child was three. You were quite sure of it when your child was five and now your child is in school and you are convinced and unwavering about it. The school is not quite as convinced and they are slow to react to your suspicions. Be prepared; the road to the diagnosis may not be easy or cheap, but in the long run it will be worth it. The steps to diagnosis below make the assumption that you have done your research about dyslexia and you understand the symptoms. If you are still at that stage, you can visit www.interdys.org for more information.

Step One: Start collecting data and buy a notebook

Does it take your child an inordinate amount of time to complete homework? Is the classwork of homework too difficult for your child's current level? Is your child being kept in at recess or after school to complete work they cannot complete during class? Document all of this. Keep a chart of the homework assignment, how long it takes and why it took so long, as well as what grade or comments they received from the teacher.

Stop doing your child's homework. Many parents will help with homework so that their child does not fall behind or come home with a paper filled with red marks. In order to prove that dyslexia is present, the school needs to see how the child is truly performing independently. If they continue to receive completed homework they will not have any evidence that an intervention is needed.

Keep every report card, every test, every written assignment, spelling test and note/email from teacher and place into the notebook you are going to buy.

Start a conversation with the school. Let them know you are collecting data and that you are concerned. Do everything via email and document their responses.

Step Two: Request an assessment from the school

Remember all that information you gathered for the step above? Now you are going to take that information and write a compelling letter to the school requesting that your child be evaluated. You can find a template at <http://www.specialeducationadvisor.com/request-for-special-education-assessment-including-sample-letter/>. Do not be afraid to use the word, dyslexia, and use it often. Under IDEA, dyslexia is listed as one of the eligible conditions under Specific Learning Disability, so do not back down from this term. If they tell you they do not test for dyslexia, then without removing the word, just agree to have his academic skills tested. This is not to time to argue about terminology, you are just trying to get the testing. There are two

directions this can go: they can test and they can deny. The next two steps deal with both scenarios.

If the school tests: how to interpret the results and how to find dyslexia (if it is present).

Most schools will test all areas of concern and this usually includes (but it not limited to) cognitive testing (aka intelligence testing), visual processing, auditory processing and reading and writing skills. If you learn nothing else from this article, learn this, dyslexia is not an auditory processing problem nor is it a visual processing problem, it is a phonological processing problem that often shows up in the subtests of the reading and writing assessments.

***Remember, schools do not diagnose, they determine eligibility.*

Scenario One: They deny services based on test results. When the IEP team reviews the test results with you and states your child does not qualify because his or her reading, writing and/or math scores are in the average or low average range, ask to see the subtests. Dyslexia often hides in the subtests. Many times the child will have done very well in the comprehension or writing of ideas and that score is pulling the composite into the average range. Yet, almost every time, a look at the subtests will reveal significant difficulty with word reading, spelling, and fluency – all signs of dyslexia. We already know these children are smart enough to comprehend, but how difficult is it to get them to that point? Pay particular attention to any writing samples that you bring with you – they often tell the story all on their own. A knowledgeable advocate will point this out (if it exists) and usually be able to get services. The final step is to have the term dyslexia noted in the notes at the very least.

Scenario Two: They agree with you and offer services. Wonderful news! Now it is time to make sure the goals are responding to the needs. Recently, I have seen far too many IEPs with three or less goals. Just last week I saw a goal that included decoding, fluency and comprehension. This is absurd and highlights the lack of knowledge not only about dyslexia, but about the reading process. There should be a separate goal for fluency, decoding and comprehension. Also often left out are spelling and sight words. These also need goals. Don't be shy; ask for as many goals as the child needs to succeed. Because we are talking about getting a diagnosis, in this scenario, the term dyslexia also needs to be in the IEP somewhere. If need be, bring a copy of the definition of SLD and highlight the word dyslexia.

The bad news: Although this is an article about diagnosis, it is very important to keep in mind that even if your student is identified by the school or another professional, they are often not equipped to remediate it. This is beyond the scope of this article, but important to remember.

Advocate Involvement: If it is possible, it may be extremely important for your advocate to also be knowledgeable about dyslexia. If they are not, it will be difficult for them to make the case that dyslexia is present. Check with your local branch of IDA for advocates in your area.

Step Three: The Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)

Unfortunately, all roads usually lead to an IEE in the case of dyslexia. You may be able to have the school financially sponsor this evaluation or may need to pay for it out of pocket (fees range from 800.00-2000.00), but either way, it is worth its weight in gold – if done correctly. In order to make this a solid evaluation, you must do your homework. The person you choose to do this evaluation needs to be completely independent of the school district. A Ph.D. or Ed.D. is not enough; they need to have expertise in the area of dyslexia. They should test ALL of the following areas:

- Phonological Processing
- Oral Reading
- Silent Reading
- Single word reading
- Processing speed/rapid naming
- Spelling
- Vocabulary
- Writing sample
- Evidence of cognitive ability
- Review of school records
- Thorough review of family and school history

This person should provide a very thorough report and be available for IEP meetings to discuss the results. Once you have this report in your hands, you can go back to the school to discuss a review if services were previously denied and insist it is placed in the student's educational record. If the testing is done correctly, it is very difficult to repudiate these evaluations.

Do you really need a diagnosis?

In my experience a diagnosis does three things: 1) gives the child the evidence he or she needs to know he or she is not 'stupid,' and removes that emotional stress, 2) places evidence in the student's file so that he or she can receive accommodations in high school and college, 3) gives everyone involved a clear path to the correct intervention so everyone can move forward.

Last but certainly not least, a child only needs to be diagnosed with dyslexia once.



Dr. Kelli Sandman-Hurley is the co-founder of the Dyslexia Training Institute (www.dyslexiatraininginstitute.org and www.dyslexiadr.com.) She is currently writing Putting the D in to the IEP and you can read excerpts at www.dyslexiadr.blogspot.com. She received her

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